

The

# KALIFORNSKI

NEWSLETTER OF THE YUGOSLAV-AMERICAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION - No. 13-July 1980  
P. O. BOX 226, Watsonville, CA 95076 Circulation 425  
(NON-POLITICAL & NON-RELIGIOUS)

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

by

Andy Gulermovich

As YACO is well into its second year, I thought it might be an opportune time to reiterate one of our organization's most important principles. Namely that YACO is a non-political and non-religious organization. This is not to say that we, as individuals, have no political ideologies or religious preference. Our Membership holds various political viewpoints and is of an equally diverse religious background. Many of YACO's members hold positions of leadership in government, religious clubs, and political organizations.

There is, however, one common thread running throughout the fabric of our YACO. All of us, regardless of our personal viewpoints, are able to come together in YACO to share a general common cultural heritage of Slavonic ancestry. Whether we call ourselves Slavonians, Croatians, Dalmatians, Slovenes, Serbians, Bosnians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Macedonians, Herzegovinians, or any other of the southern Slavic peoples, there is room for all of us under the umbrella of YACO.

There have been many things that have separated our peoples in the past and just because we as an organization have specifically chosen to ignore them, does not mean that we are not aware of them. To put it in simple terms, YACO has opted to "accentuate the positive."

I personally take pride whenever I read or hear of any Slav's positive accomplishments that enhance the esteem.  
(cont'd next page)

## YACO Officers

PRESIDENT: Andy Gulermovich  
758-6252

VICE-PRESIDENT: Nevenka Novcich  
724-7647

SECRETARY: Bruce Arthur  
476-4586

FINANCIAL SECRETARY: Dorothy (Radov)  
Bohn - 722-6288

TREASURER: Ron Hill - 724-1284

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR: John (Ivo) Basor  
724-2169

## Coming Up

WHEN: JULY 4th - 1980 !!!!!!!

WHERE: Corralitos Padres Park

WHO: YACO members, friends, relatives, and anyone interested in a good time!

PROGRAM: BAR-B-QUE with Good Food, Good Company and GREAT Entertainment!!!!!!

NOTE: Tickets: \$5 adults  
\$1.50 children under 12

(NO MEETING FIRST SUNDAY  
IN JULY IN LIEU OF 4th)



Get in the  
Spirit...

(Pres' message cont'd)

of our peoples. There have been many Yugoslav clubs come and go. I firmly believe that YACO is here to stay because of its first principle, "NO POLITICS AND NO RELIGION."

# Welcome New Members

Lena Strazicich	- Watsonville
Rayko & Blagica Vranješ & Fam	- Watsonville
John Batistich	- Watsonville
Eric A. Brautovic'	- Soquel
Antone & Ann Pavlovich	- Watsonville
Shahe & Vivian Moutafian	- Watsonville
M/M Martin Kulish	- Watsonville
John & Lucy Selak	- Watsonville
Ray & Mary Clough	- Salinas
Susan Gospodnetich (Renewal)	- Watsonville
M/M J. Saveria	- Watsonville
Jeanne Chicourrat (Renewal)	- Watsonville

## SUBSCRIBERS

Milan & Ruza Polovina	- Alhambra
M/M Tony Pervetich	- Watsonville
M/M David P. Stolich	- Aptos
M/M Lockwood J. Foresti-	San Ramon
Tom Panzich	- Watsonville
M/M Steve Mosunic'	- Santa Clara

WELCOME TO YACO - ENJOY

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**you'll love it**

Our program for the 4th will be a most entertaining event. We are gathering for the first time and hope to be joined by a great majority of the Yugoslav community as well as the community at large.

The tickets are now on sale from any YACO officer and are selling for \$5 for adults and \$1.50 for children under 12.

The dinner will include barbequed skirt steak (prepared by some of the finest Yugoslav cooks), beans, salad, and fresh french bread. Also available will be kobasica sandwiches as well as soft drinks for the children and beer, wine or coffee for the adults.

This is the first celebration.  
Come and help us to start a tradition.  
We guarantee a fine time with MARTIN  
SANTICH and his Yugoslav music. We  
will also have some folk dancing  
done by our very own YACO members.

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## Orchids & Accolades



by  
Babe (Brautovich) Hill

ORCHIDS & ACCOLADES goes to about 60-70 YACOS who attended the Duquesne Tamburitzans' program at De Anza College... the program was sponsored by VESELI SELJACI and we did ourselves proud in attendance...besides the entertainment, I especially enjoyed meeting CAROLINE BAHR, JOHN BRITZ and NANCY BJELETICH, and finally put faces to the voices I spoke to on the phone... Hello to you three especially...Our JUST DESSERTS potluck was a great success, but if we have too many of those, we will have to call ourselves the "Metra Cal for Lunch Bunch"... The donations for the Country Store brought forth a lot of homemade goodies thanks to IRENE STRAZICICH, BILL & MARY LAWRENCE and ANN RADALYAC... Once again I scored well...Sure hope you did too... PROFESSOR VIOLICH's program was really great and I'm sure our membership thought so too, otherwise 117 people sat around for nothing... We must

try that again soon... When and if another trip to Jackson comes up, be sure you sign up...It was a real dilly!..The weather was "Par Excellance" and PAUL'S BOARDING HOUSE is quite an experience!!! There is food galore and a 1/4 of lemon pie for dessert... Ask ANDY about that!..Members present were A. GULERMOVICH (driver), J. BULAICH, N. NOVCICH, J. HEEBNER, K. DERPICH, M/M ADAMS, M/M STOCKING, M/M HILL, M/M HAMBLIN, M. GIZDICH, A. RADALYAC, and N. BRAUTOCIC Sr. and his guest... Guess who was dancing in the yard to Yugoslav cassettes from the van?... Speaking of BRAUTOVIC... We have just gotten our youngest single membership in the name of ERIC A. BRAUTOVIC who is 12 years old and the grandson of NICK BRAUTOVIC Sr.... Gee so many of us are going to Yugoslavia this year... I won't try to name them all but again I want to say goodbye to TERI GULERMOVICH who has probably left already for a "Cram Session" in Yugoslav... With her courage and intelligence, I think we will be well represented... Good luck TERI... In closing I want to say thanks and many ORCHIDS & ACCOLADES to our Travel Director NEVENKA NOVCICH... If you want to go someplace, you had better mention it to (cont'd next page)



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(Orchids cont'd)

her, and I'll bet she will do her darnest to get a bus and group together... One comment before I go: A lot of planning and work is going into our 4th of July Bar-b-que so please buy your ticket or tickets and plan to attend... This could be the first of many to come, but we need you and your family and friends to make it an annual affair!!! Let's give our 4th chairpeople our complete support and turn out in full membership... Thanks... See you next month...

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# AWARDS

YACO scholarships were awarded last week to two deserving students from our local school district. A \$100 award was given to MARY ARNERICH daughter of Jim and Mary Arnerich. MARY (or MIMI as her friends call her) graduated from Watsonville High School on June 11th. The second award of \$100 was given to GLEN THOMAS NIELSEN son of David and Lillian (Jercich) Nielsen of Aptos. GLEN graduated from Aptos High School on June 11th. Congratulations to both of these students and best of luck in your future endeavors.

# Tips to Share

"i" before "e", except after "c" unless  
the sound is like "a" as in "neighbor  
and "weigh".

VISIT A FRIEND TODAY!

# YACO GRADS

**CONGRATULATIONS also to:**

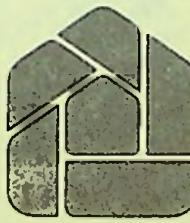
LIZ (Ann) MEIDL daughter of Dick & Lean (Brautovich) Meidl. Liz graduated from Watsonville High June 11th.

MARK VRANJES son of Milan & Mary Vranjes. MARK graduated also from Watsonville High on June 11th.

ANTHONY DERPICH son of Peter & Emily Derpich. ANTHONY graduated from Moreland Notre Dame Academy with awards and will be attending high school in the Fall.

MICHAEL SOLANO son of Alex & Patricia (Gospodnetich) Solano graduated from the 8th grade at Pajaro Elementary School on June 11th. MICHAEL received an award for studies achievement and one for being the Most Valuable Player on the wrestling team.

MICHELLE SOLANO daughter of Alex & Patricia (Gospodnetich) Solano graduated also from Pajaro Elementary School on June 11th also with an award.



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# COOKING



SLAVONIAN PORK CHOPS  
(SLAVONSKI SVINJSKI ODRESCI)

2 lbs. pork chops  
1/4 c. flour  
1/4 c. lard or shortening  
3-4 strips bacon, diced  
1/2 c. sliced smoked sausage  
1/2 lb. green peppers, sliced  
2-3 fresh tomatoes, sliced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1 tsp paprika  
salt & pepper to taste

Season the pork chops with salt & pepper. Roll in flour and fry in hot lard. Fry the bacon in its own fat. Add the sausage and stir well. Season with paprika. Allow the sausage to brown a little, then add the tomatoes and green peppers. Allow to simmer over low heat until the vegetables are half cooked. Add the pork chops and continue to simmer until everything is tender. Serve with mashed potatoes or on a bed of rice. Serves 6.  
(Croatian Cuisine publication)

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**By: ADAM S. ETEROVICH**

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# Sports In Yugoslavia



by John (Ivo) Basor

At the end of the 31st round of the Soccer's First League, the following scores were achieved:

OSIJEK-OLIMPIJA	4-0
PARTIZAN-VOJVODINA	0-0
SARAJEVO-ZELJEZNICAR	1-3
RIJEKA-CRVENA	
ZVEZDA	2-2
NAPREDAK-HAJDUK	2-2
ČELIK-DINAMO	2-2
VARDAR-RADNIČKI	2-2
SLOBODA-VELEŽ	2-0
BORAC-BUDUĆNOST	3-1

# FABULOUS!

JUDY (GULERMOVICH) AUTREY has become one of YACO's greatest supporters. JUDY has already sold 18 4th of July dinner tickets. Wouldn't it be great if all YACO members could be so determined! SUPPORT YACO and we'll show you a good time to be had by all!

~~~~~  
~~~~~



## Treasurer's Report

by RON HILL

Bank balance as of June 15, 1980 ----- \$ 627.41

	Income		Deposits
Memberships	95.00	June 2	658.75
Subscriptions	20.00	June 11	95.00
Bus Rental & Tickets			
D. U. Tamburitza	577.00		
Country Store	25.75	.	
Personal Messages	6.00		
July 4th Tickets	10.00		
Scholarship	20.00	(oops)	
Total Income	<u>\$753.75</u>		Total Deposits \$753.75

	Expenses
Printing Newsletter	159.75
Mailing Newsletter	25.93
Printing Stationary &	
July 4th tickets	84.91
Office Supplies	8.25
Veseli Seljaci Tickets	457.00
Charter Bus for D.U. Tam	163.00
Statue for raffle	31.00
Scholarship Fund	100.00
Postage Stamps	15.00
Total Expenses	<u>\$1,044.84</u>



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# Best Wishes

Happy Birthday to Nevenka Novcich on Sunday, June 15th. Best wishes are sent from Majka and Tata Guse.

Happy Birthday greetings are sent to The Editor, Pat Solano from all of the Solano Family on June 30th.

# ..... ***Gift Idea!*** .....

We now have gift certificates if you would like to send a gift subscription or a gift membership to a friend or relative. Simply send the name of the persons so gifted along with your check for the proper amount to YACO Gift, P.O.Box 226, Watsonville, CA 95076.

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# ATTENTION

If you would like to donate items for the raffle at our 4th of July Bar-b-que, please call Babe at 724-1284. Help us to make this a GREAT 4th celebration and continue such an event for each coming year.

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## The Croatian Roots in America

by Adam S. Etorevich

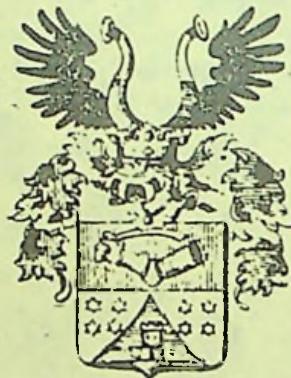
KOVACEVICH  
CROATIAN HERITAGE  
IN AMERICA AND CROATIA

KOVACEVICH is found in all parts of Croatia. It is a very common name. In English it would be Smith, Smithson or Smithy. Other variations would be Kovac, Kovacich. First Lieutenant Michael Kovacevich was granted coats-of-arms on June 1, 1821, during military service. A recording of arms was deposited in the State Archives of Croatia.

Pvt. Jakob Kovacevich served in Cognovich's company, 4th Regiment, European Brigade, Louisiana Militia Volunteers, Confederate Army of 1861 and Cpl. Nikola Covacevich served in the Slavonian Rifles, 1st Company Cazadores Esp. Regiment, Louisiana Militia Volunteers, Confederate Army of 1861.

Antonio Kovacevich from Starigrad on the Island of Hvar voted in Philadelphia in 1849, was the vice-president of the Slavonic Illyric Society of San Francisco in 1860 (the oldest overseas Croatian Society, org. 1857) and was the owner of the famed Presidio Road Saloon in San Francisco in 1867. Antonio also mined gold and made a strike. He died in 1882 in San Francisco. Dominic Kovacevich voted in San Francisco in 1868 and was a barkeeper in Stockton, California, in 1873. John Kovacevich was a barkeeper in White Pine County, Nevada, in 1875 and Vincent Kovacevich, a fisherman, died in San Francisco in 1881, far from his beloved Dalmatia.

Croatians have been a part of America for over 200 years. Courtesy of the Croatian Genealogical Society, 1372 Rosewood Ave., San Carlos, Calif. 94070.



We are proud of the birthplaces

by Andy Gulerovich

This delightful small town (population 4,000) is located on the Adriatic Coast around 45 miles south of Split and 100 miles north of Dubrovnik. The town is at the foot of the Biokovo Mountains in a wide cove surrounded by large rock promontories. The main industries of Makarska are tourism, small manufacturing plants, a plastics factory and farming which includes vegetable and fruit growing, wine grapes, olives and figs. In 1959 a large sports complex was built further adding to the town's attractions.

The pre-Slav name of Makarska was Muccurum. According to legend it was destroyed in 548 A.D. by the East Gothic King, Totila. When the Slavs first arrived in the Balkans, Makarska became one of their most important strongholds. In 887 they destroyed the attacking Venetian fleet near Makarska. Up to the 14th century, Makarska rec-

(cont'd next page)



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ognized the Hungaro-Croatian rulers. From 1324 to 1463 it was under the control of Bosnian rulers of the Kotromanic family. The Turks held Makarska from 1499 to 1646 and the Venetians from 1646 to 1797. Napoleon of France created the Illyrian provinces in 1797 and Makarska was an integral part of his scheme until Austria assumed control of the Dalmatian coast in 1815 following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Makarska stayed in the Austrian Empire until the creation of Yugoslavia in 1919.

Along the waterfront (*velika obala*), there were numerous Baroque homes, some of which are still standing. The Baroque church, Sveti Filip Neri, and the nearby monestary have preserved their original appearance. Behind the church, there are several ancient Roman stone slabs and pillars with Latin inscriptions and an open air theater which seats 1,300 people. Just north of the waterfront there is a pyramid shaped monument which was erected in the honor of Napoleon's Marshall Marmont. The original inscription was replaced by a new one in 1817 commemorating the visit of the Austrian Emperor Francis II.

Other sites in Makarska include a Franciscan monestary which dates from 1400 and an old church with a Baroque belltower. On this church's main altar is the painting "Assumption of the Virgin" by Peter de Coster. In the cellar an old library houses old Turkish documents and other works of art.

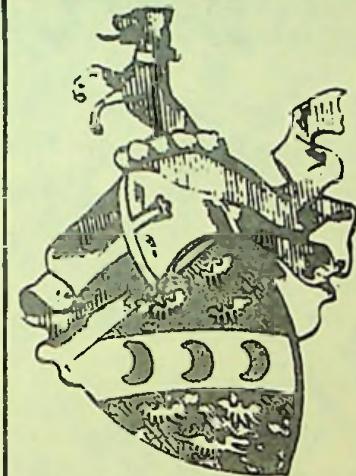
A flight of stairs leads from the waterfront up to Kaćić Square in the center of town. In the town square there is a statue of the poet, Andrija Kaćić Miošić. The statue was sculpted by Ivan Rendic in 1890. On the north side of the town square is Sveti Marko, an old Baroque church. The sacristy contains a collection of portraits of 18th and 19th century Makarska Bishops, religious silver objects, and icons from the 16th century. At the extreme end of the square is a beautiful Baroque building, the Ivanišević Palace. The courtyard is tastefully orname ted and the palace itself is well preserved.

The environs of Makarska are equally beautiful and there are numerous old churches, monuments and Roman ruins. Above the town is Staza Pass which affords a magnificent view of the islands of Brac and Hvar. If you are ever in Split or Dubrovnik, you really shouldn't miss Makarska. It is a pleasant drive along the Adriatic Highway from either city. I am sure that its beauty, serenity, and history will enchant you.

(Milan Vranjes and his family hail from Makarska.)

## CROATIAN Roots in America

By Adam  
S. Eterovich



BACIĆI-BACICH-BACIC

Bacich can be found in America written as Basich, Bachich and Bacic because of the difficulty of Croatian accent marks being dropped upon coming to America. "Bac" means cow-keeper, herdsman and shepherd in Croatian. This is probably the root and original meaning of the name as many Croatians were herdsmen.

Bacich is a very popular name in Croatia and is found in all parts of the country. The Bacich clan has two coats of arms. Arms were granted in 1545 to Gabriel Bacich and are on file at the University Library in Zagreb. Arms were also granted in 1717 to George Bacich and are on file at the National Archives in Zagreb.

The first Croatian hall built in America was at Sutter Creek, Amador County, California in 1873. Amador is still the center of an old Croatian colony which traces its roots to the gold rush. Anton, John, Mathew and Peter Bacich all sought their fortunes in the foothills of the Sierras. The Catholic Cemetery at Jackson is full of Croatian pioneers.

John Bacich was selling oysters on St. Louis St., New Orleans in 1859 and Michael Bacich maintained a grocery house on Decatur St.

Courtesy of the Croatian Genealogical Society, 1372 Rosewood Ave., San Carlos, CA 94070.

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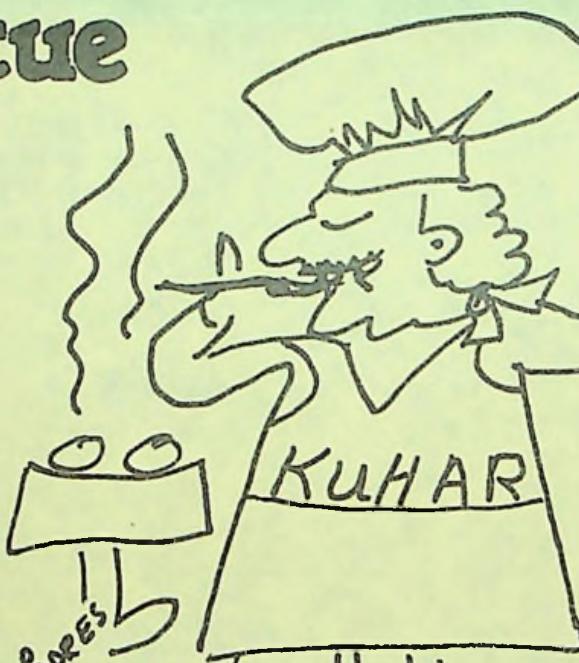
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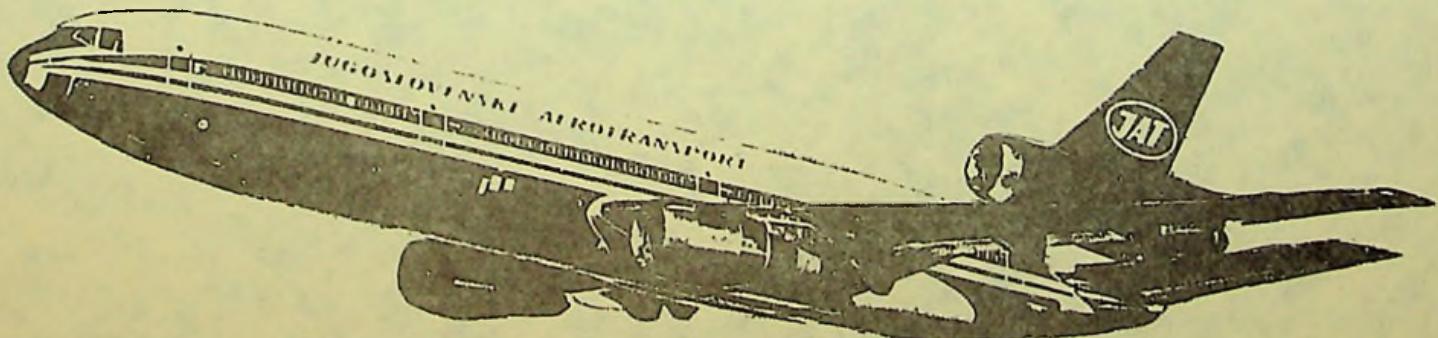
Only JAT (Yugoslav Airlines) did NOT increase their prices this year.

The old prices from 1979 to cities in Yugoslavia are still in effect.

In addition to the four Non-Stop Flights weekly from the Pan Am Terminal in New York, JAT is adding one more flight this summer. Starting June 1, we will also have a flight on Mondays. JAT would like to remind you that their charter DC-10 departs every Thursday evening from Chicago to Belgrade with stops in Zagreb or Ljubljana.

These flights present an excellent opportunity for you to bring your relatives or friends to America this summer or for you and your family to visit the Old Country for less money than you would have to pay on any other airline.

You can make reservations with your travel agent or directly through our JAT offices in Los Angeles. Our telephone numbers are: (213) 388-0379 or 388-0370.



BY BORA ĐORDJEVIĆ

# ZUKO DŽUMHUR

A talk with the well-known Yugoslav artist, cartoonist and travel writer.

(REVIEW)

Zuko Džumhur is both painter and writer, director and scenographer, dreamer and fighter for artists' rights, reporter, tourist publicist and wanderer. But to those who eagerly await every Sunday to see his latest vision of world events and political life, he is first and foremost a political cartoonist. For over thirty years, this native of Herzegovina has been drawing and writing about momentous and ticklish themes.

Of all professions connected with journalism, the cartoonist's seems the freest. As a rule, he speaks not in the name of his paper but in his own name, and never publishes a cartoon anonymously.

Džumhur's cartoons with their distinctive graphic style, are remarkable for the observation of detail and feeling for the satirical element in contemporary events. While a student of the Belgrade Art Academy (he studied under the eminent Yugoslav painters Petar Dobrović and Milo Milunović), he attracted attention with his unusual talent for graphic art, a genre to which he has remained faithful, combining drawings with words in his cartoons and travellologues.

Zuko never writes his texts at the typewriter, but always by hand, with calligraphic care. Sometimes he rewrites them as many as seven times, taking pleasure in the act of writing as well as composing. He complains that children today are not taught penmanship, as in the old days. In his opinion, to write illegibly is an act of rudeness.

He is the author of several travel books ("Letter from Spain" and "Letter from the Bosphorus"), and of a TV documentary series on the ancient towns of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which he himself appeared as the guide. What prompted him to write this series was the desire to record the "Last phase in the transformation of a world which has lasted a very long time and is now disappearing before our very eyes".

Zuko drives an old "Spaček" (a Yugoslav assembled small Renault), but not out of financial necessity nor meanness. The "Spaček" is not a car, it's a philosophy, he

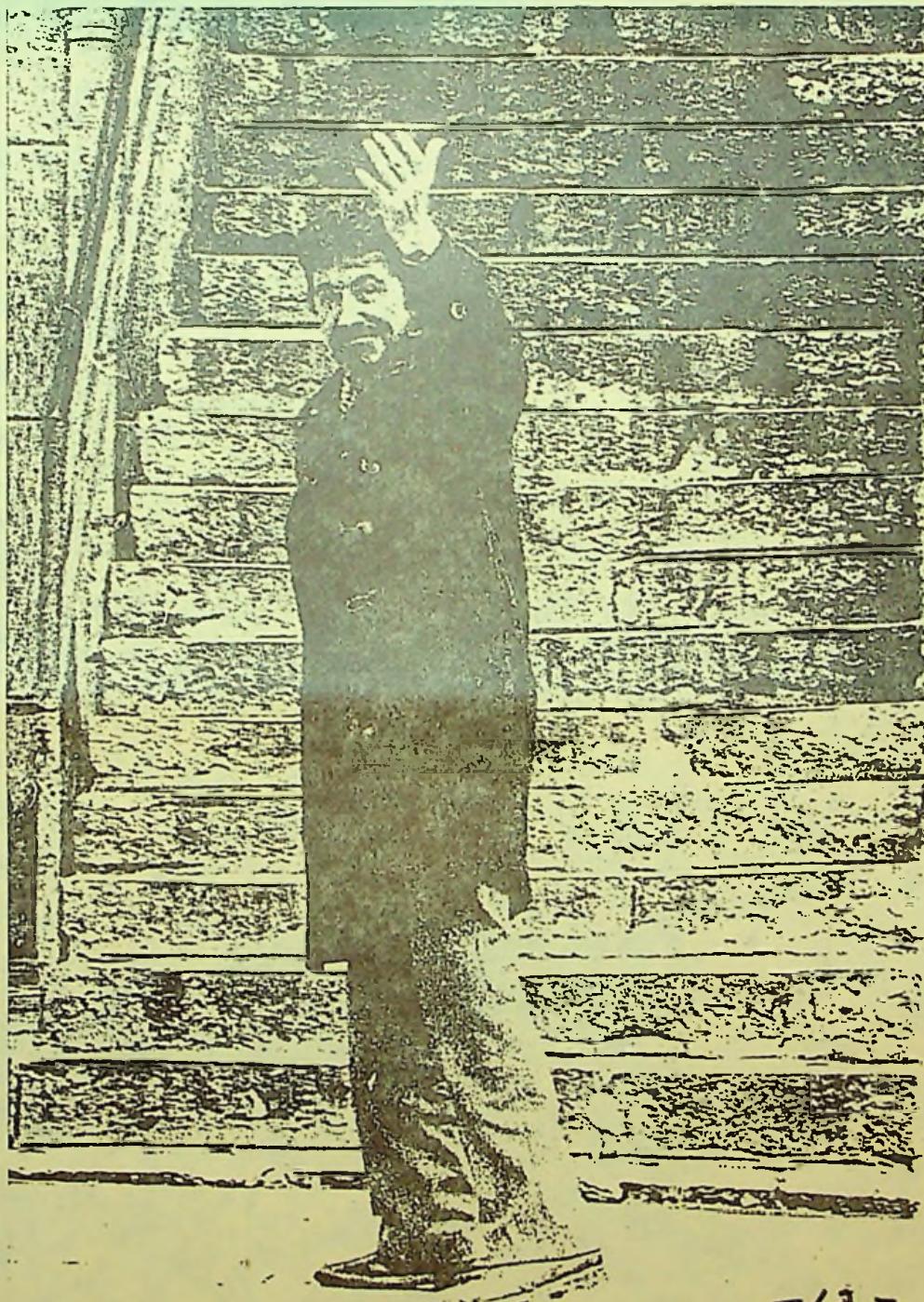
says. He claims that the trip from Belgrade to Dubrovnik (about 600 km.) takes him a week in this vehicle.

"I set out from Belgrade and I have to stop in Tuzla to see the painter Ismet Mujezinović.

Then again I have to break by journey in Sarajevo, where I have friends, and then in Konjic — I can't bypass the friends there. Then I must stop a bit at Počitelj, and drop in on my family in Mostar, so that a week has passed before I get to Dubrovnik. But what's the hurry? These days everybody seems to be dashing . . ."

Zuko does not admit that he is first and foremost a cartoonist, a journalist with a felt-tipped pen. He puts it this way:

"It may sound big-headed, conceited . . . but when I walk along the street, in my daily life, I behave like the complete man. I am both painter and poet, and a man of the theatre and cinema. I don't look on life through just one medium in which I am going to express myself . . ."



Another aspect of Zuko's life is his tireless activity agitating for more artist's studios, exhibition premises, and generally better conditions of life for Yugoslav artists. He has been one of the initiators and made valuable contributions in reviving the old quarters of towns, preserving old streets, such as the Skadarlija section of Belgrade, and the old town of Počitelj on the River Neretva near Mostar.

"We had a hard task convincing the city fathers of the need to restore Skadarlija", he recalls. "I imagined that the older generation of Belgrade people would frequent the place, to enjoy the old city songs, but Skadarlija has become a gathering place for the young people of Belgrade. The same thing has happened in the Baščaršija (bazaar) in Sarajevo."

Zuko is familiar with the trials and tribulations of the newspaperman's life: the editor's anxiety whether his material will arrive on time, with the hungry presses waiting to swallow the latest edition. His best friends are journalists, reporters who travel around, searching for the truth, and often die young . . .

"A journalist's life is certainly strenuous and hazardous. How many friends I've seen carried off in the prime of life, the victims of heart attacks, mental breakdowns, traffic accidents . . . The subject we write least about is our own profession. This is something I feel deeply about because I have been a member of this profession for a full thirty years now."

How many times has Džumhur, with his penetrating cartoons, revealed to us the dilemmas of our time and society? When one tells him that he seems to have great sympathy for the failings of his fellow men, he does not deny it:

"As long as we live we are bound to have fellow-feelings with our contemporaries. Selfishness, cruelty, ruthlessness towards one's fellows, is repulsive. People are inclined to forget that life is short, that man is only human."

In recent years, Džumhur has also found time to paint.

"I'm a bit strange, perhaps", he explains, "but I come more and more to the conclusion that the most sincere painting is by children" and people of mature years. I believe this to be the secret of the great contemporary painter Chagal, who in his old age paints the modern world seen through the curious eyes of a child. It seems to me that the so-called years of maturity are the most fruitful for poetic painting."

What prompts this restless spirit in him? Why does he engage in so many fields, work and travel ceaselessly?

"When a man travels he is always seeking himself. After seeing different landscapes and people, he can return to his own room and sum up his experiences, reaching fresh conclusions about people, their destinies, poetry, sorrow, human life . . ."

His writings about the East have met with great interest among the reading public, displaying as they do all Džumhur's understanding for people, their way of life and customs . . .

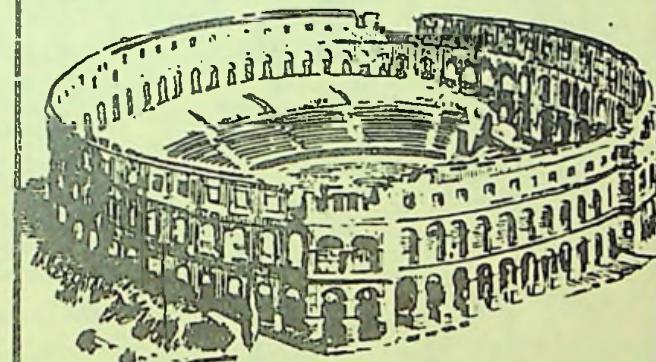
What is his attitude towards his own work?

"I have never played around with any job I have undertaken", he comments. "My work is my daily bread, and I respect it. If I didn't work regularly, I should be very unhappy — I don't know how I'd survive spiritually without it. I shudder to think of it. It is a great blessing in life to do work that you love, and even more so to make a reasonable living from work that you enjoy."

"Maybe that daily bread doesn't always come easily, but after all, it doesn't do any good to overeat. I find great joy in life, in every day and night. There is much good and much evil in the world, much that is beautiful and a lot that is ugly, but so it has always been and will always be, till the end of time. Life is not just paradise or hell. Since it's the only one we've got, why shouldn't we love it?"

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(REVIEW 1969)

In the year 1102, King Koloman (or Kalman) of Hungary was crowned ruler of Croatia and Dalmatia in the cathedral of the Dalmatian town of Biograd na Moru. For the Croatian nobles assembled for the ceremony, together with high church dignitaries and Hungarian magnates, this must have been a bitter moment, but they were aware that, following the extinction of the Croatian royal dynasty, the acceptance of Koloman, that strange, ugly, extremely learned man, was the best solution of their predicament.

Koloman's uncle, King Ladislav (Laszlo), had wanted him to enter the Church, where his ugliness and physical defects would not be a handicap, and his intellectual and spiritual qualities could find an outlet, but Koloman escaped to Poland before he could be confined to a monastery. On his uncle's death, he returned to Hungary and seized the crown. Having settled relations with the

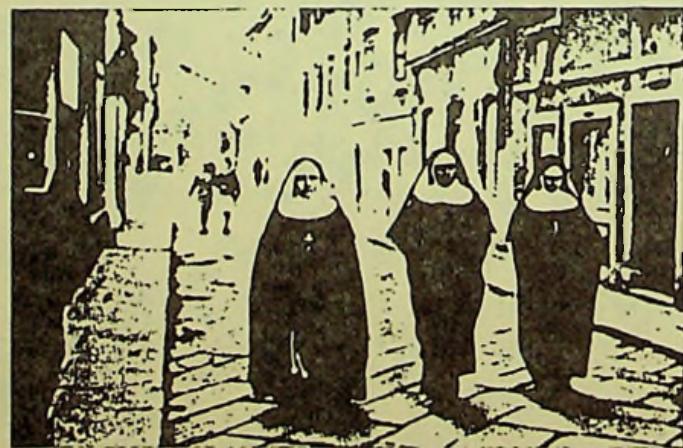
Crusaders by concluding an agreement with Godfrey of Bouillon, married a Norman princess from Naples, and eliminated possible claimants to the throne, Koloman became undisputed master of the country. When he had subdued opposition from his legitimate younger half-brother, Almoš, (Koloman was himself the illegitimate son of King Geza I), he gave orders for Almoš and his infant son to be blinded. But despite this barbarous act, Koloman proved to be a wise and just legislator as well as a strong king. Wishing to secure a seaboard for Hungary, he set out to conquer Croatia and Dalmatia in 1097. This proved to be no easy task, but by 1102 the whole of these regions was under his control. He had particular difficulty in capturing the important coastal city of Zadar (Zara), which stubbornly withheld all attacks and refused to yield. Ivan Orsini, a high church dignitary, advised the king to offer guarantees of the city's freedom and rights in order

to win it over by peaceful means. The wise king, realising that it would be better to make a ceremonial entry into the city than conquer it with guns, sent word that he "...would rather make good friends than rule by force".

It is not known whether the proud and beautiful Abbess Većenega, lady superior of the Benedictine nunnery of St. Mary in Zadar, attended the coronation in nearby Biograd, though she may well have done so since she was of high birth. It is certain, however, that during a royal audience with the Croatian nobility, she was personally presented to Koloman in the presence of the nobles and several bishops. The king must have been deeply impressed by the beauty, dignified bearing and political astuteness of this woman, undoubtedly one of the most interesting figures in Croatian medieval history. Descended from the Croatian kings, Većenega was the daughter of the Abbess Ćika, who entered

# The Beautiful Abbess Vecenega

BY KATARINA ADANJA



A scene from the Adriatic town of Zadar. Photo by "Review"

the convent of St. Mary after her husband's death and was for many years its lady superior. In his will, King Petar Krešimir of Croatia mentioned her as "my sister Ćika", though they were not, in fact, so closely related. Before entering the convent, Većenega had herself been married, to a wealthy nobleman named Dobrosav, and was referred to by the nuns, even after her death, as a widowed princess. This was not, in fact, true, but was intended to increase the respect of the people for the abbess and nunnery by

stressing her high birth. Before taking the veil, Većenega had lived a life of luxury, but she was also renowned as a benefactress of the Church and the poor. When her husband died, she joined her mother, and gradually took over the running of the convent, becoming its abbess after her mother's death in about 1096. To hold this position, she could not have been under forty, according to the rules of the Church. Since a high-ranking personage was in question, some slight concession might have been made in her case, but she must have been close to the stipulated age, since Pope Gregory I had strictly forbidden that convents should be run by women younger than forty ("Juvenculas abbatissas vehementissime prohibemus"). On entering the convent, Većenega brought with her many valuables from her home, luxurious furniture, fine dishes and other objects of a worldly character, which indicated her distinguished lineage. This convent was, in fact, intended primarily for the daughters and widows of the nobility, women of lower rank being admitted only as servants. Since many of its inmates were strong-willed women, accustomed to command, there were frequent quarrels and disputes in the convent which higher ecclesiastical bodies were obliged to settle. Sometimes, the abbot of the monastery of St. Kreševan in Zadar or the Archbishop of Zadar had to intervene personally.

The convent of St. Mary was always held in high esteem because of its extremely valuable treasury and its cultural importance: it ran a public school with teachers of "grammar" and had a very fine library. In her early years as abbess, Većenega commissioned a Gospels of great artistic value from the scriptorium of St. Kreševan's monastery. This manuscript with richly illuminated initials is now kept in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

When Većenega appeared before Koloman at the assembly of Croatian nobles, she requested his formal confirmation of the "*regia libertas*", former rights, of her convent. Her striking appearance and eloquence made a deep



*The 11th-century convent church of St. Mary, which was endowed by the Hungarian-Croatian king, Koloman. Photo by Mladen Grčević*

impression upon the king, who was greatly flattered that this beautiful kinswoman of the Kresimir dynasty should beg a favour of him, thereby confirming, at the same time, that she recognized him as the legitimate ruler. The king very willingly bestowed "everlasting peace and royal freedom" on the convent, and gave a pledge to protect its estates. It is from the charter granted to the convent on this occasion that we know of the convening of this assembly of Croatian nobles.

The king's generosity to the convent and Većenega puzzled many contemporaries. Perhaps Koloman, who was unpopular among the clergy and involved in the dispute between the Pope and Anti-Pope, hoped, by this gesture towards a convent to which Rome had always shown favour, to demonstrate his loyalty to the authorities in Rome. Many believed, however, that the reason for this generosity was the king's personal feelings for the lovely abbess. Be that as it may,

Koloman certainly endowed the convent richly and had a bell-tower added to the convent church. Since the abbess was supervising the building work, this entailed frequent meetings with the king. The bell-tower, a Romanesque structure with harmonious lines, had a rectangular chamber on the first floor which served as the main room of Većenega and her successors. From here, a door led onto a balcony from which the abbess could watch the nuns at work and worship. Većenega's cell, luxuriously appointed and decorated with frescos, contained four pillars without any architectural function, on which the letters R.CO - LLO - MAN - NUS were carved. There has been much conjecture as to why the abbess had the king's name carved on the pillars in her room, which was contrary to monastic custom. By that time the king was already a widower, lonely, afflicted by frequent severe headaches, very probably suffering torture of mind for his cruelty to his brother and nephew, so perhaps he sought consolation, and tranquility in his friendship with Većenega. Their relationship has given rise to various, quite unfounded, hypotheses — that Većenega became Koloman's morganatic wife, that after an unhappy marriage with the king she retired to the convent to which Koloman was so generous, and so on, but all these are merely the product of imaginations fired by the intriguing friendship between the ugly king and the beautiful abbess.

Very probably there was something between the physically defective but wise and learned ruler and the lovely and well-educated royal abbess much stronger and deeper than a common interest in a convent and its bell-tower. In history, truth and imagination sometimes cross, sometimes run parallel, and sometimes are lost in the colourful creations of legend and human fancy. The bell-tower of St. Mary's in Zadar still stands, keeping the secret of what these two exceptional and lonely people meant to each other in those distant, troubled times:

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